

WISHBONE ASH

From Dolly Mixtures to

THERE is some justice in music business after all. The band everyone has long tagged "going to be big" or "show promise" "deserve to do well", have finally stormed with their new album "Argus". Wishbone Ash are, of course, the band — and the sales figures for the album in the first few days of release have exceeded 25,000.

This week they set off for their third American tour which means they'll be away for some six weeks — but prior to their departure I spoke to bass player Martin Turner.

Turner was obviously delighted with the sales but cynical about the prospect of a high placing in the album charts, never believing anything until he sees it in black and white.

One thing he had been confident about however, was the fact that it would do well.

"Yes, we thought it would do well because the whole thing hangs together — all the numbers flow — even the cover looks great. Like 'Pilgrimage' (the last album) it was a mixture — you could say that was a bag of dolly mixtures and this one is Quality Street.

"We've always had a lot of

faith in ourselves — you can see that from the way everyone has stuck together. So many bands keep together for say, six months and if it doesn't start to happen, then the first thing they do is to break up — because you get a good bit of press if you break up."

Wishbone are one of the few bands around who never fell foul of the publicity hype — simply because it was not the kind of thing they wanted to happen. Comments Turner:

"We really believed England is the sort of place where people are susceptible to publicity, hype and all that, but in America so many bands have used that way of getting through. I think one of the things that exists over there is the fact that the place is so vast and you can't possibly play gigs up and down the country and cover places two or three times — that would probably take years.

Working class

"Whereas in England we've been able to do that — really concentrate on working the country hard. We're all working class lads and we don't mind working hard."

There are many obvious factors that show when a band has

made it. Notable with Wishbone recently have been the amount of groups who have been trying to imitate their style of playing.

"Without sounding as if I'm blowing my trumpet, we've noticed lots of little rip offs. We've actually played with bands and they've come up to us at the end of the set and said, 'wow man, the way you used those guitars was really great' and the next time we see them, six months later they've been trying to do it.

"We even did a gig with the Tremeloes and they were commenting on one of our numbers in particular. I think it was 'Where Were You Tomorrow' which as a matter of fact there isn't much harmony guitar on — but they obviously watched us.

"Then three or four months later they released a single which has the same beat and same harmony lead guitar in it. You couldn't help thinking 'I know where they got that idea from'.

"We didn't object to it at all — they were trying to do it but it wasn't really coming off. It was a bit cheeky to be that deliberate — it really stuck out.

"It's nice to think we may be influencing people — we've noticed about three groups with names taken from our numbers — Jailbait and Phoenix Ash or

something. Little groups that have ripped off our names. It's rather funny really. But as far as the guitar thing is concerned — which has been the main rip off, I think we can do it better than most bands that attempt it so we're not bothered.

"We're lucky enough to have two lead guitarists that get on so well. They never wanted to fight — you know a lot of guitarists have a real big competition thing going for them on stage. They are both trying to drown one another with volume. Ted (Turner) and Andy (Powell) aren't into that — they would rather pull together."

Ego trips

One danger I put to Turner that might have to be overcome in the future might be an ego trip for any one member (or all of) the band. Amazingly and very logically too, he replied:

"The reason for any musician wanting to get up on the stage and play music is because there is an ego involved. But similarly you've got to realise that if you've got to belong to a group, then if you're sensible about it, you have to accept the fact that the other three guys help to balance the band.

"Like you may have disagreements — a couple of months ago

I freaked out at the end of a set — we had a bit of an argument about a couple of numbers and I was ready to bash Steve (Upton the drummer) in the face. I was that annoyed — "Anyway we had a hell of an argument in the dressing room and I think there were a couple of reporters there — so someone made sure they were steered clear of the dressing room otherwise there would have been rumours of Wishbone breaking up or fights in the dressing room.

"But that night, it was just a point we disagreed on — but we always manage to sort that sort of thing out in the end.

"Everyone accepts the balance in the group — we're one of those groups who believes in personalities being different. Some groups seem to have the idea that if they can find another guy who has got exactly the same musical ideas as them then they form up.

"You get these supergroups with guys who think exactly the same. But to me that's a bad thing because it's too narrow minded — people just aren't like that. Everyone is different and you have to accept that in music too.

"With our arguments — for instance, Steve has this talent for really being able to dig you in the ribs very hard, just by saying something, because he has this

knack of being able to say something with such a twist that it really hurts.

"He probably thinks that is quite a fair thing to do and if I turned around and smashed him in the teeth that would be an unfair thing to do — but I don't see it that way. The only way I can cope with it is to be physically violent. I've never actually belted him yet. We get on very well now — but there was a time when we didn't get on so well."

Was there ever, I asked Turner, a time when the band nearly split up?

"I think one of the things the band had to get over is that we all had very different vocal styles. We are all very different types of singers and we were constantly being told that we couldn't sing. And that really started to bug a couple of guys in the band.

"I think that anyone can sing — you could sing if you want. If you're going to say that no one in our band can sing — then you can say that Mick Jagger can't sing — or John Lennon or Bob Dylan can't sing, Neil Young even. They are all guys who sing flat and if you listen carefully to some of our albums you'll hear me singing flat. But if you've got a sensitive ego that's the kind of thing that can really disturb you

Bassist MARTIN TURNER talks to Julie Webb about the band's development

Quality Street

and it stops you believing in yourself.

"You want to give up — it's times like that where it's really in the balance. You don't know what to do."

There was also in the past a time when two of the band were asked to join another group . . . Turner expounds:

Potential

"It was when Peter Banks had just left Yes. He saw the band play and I think he was one of the first people in the music business to see us and realise the potential of the group.

"Anyway we got chatting to him and he asked us how we were getting on. We were earning peanuts then — getting a couple of quid each a week and living in grot holes.

"Pete was trying to get a band together and although he didn't want to break our group up, he did ask Steve and I if we were interested in joining him.

"He said, 'Look if you're happy with your group then don't let me break it up — I wouldn't want that, but if you're not happy and you are interested in getting a group together you are two guys I really would like to play with'.

"That was a long time ago, only a few months after Wishbone had started and it was a hard decision to come to — because it would have been very easy for Steve and I to break away and forget the band.

"It would have lifted us a mile — but we thought about it and

decided we had to do what we set out to do. We had so much faith in Andy and Ted, anyway."

As yet, there have been no definite plans to lift a track off "Argus" and release it as a single. Yet in the past numbers like "Blind Eye" (from the first album) were released. I asked Turner if they had any objections to singles being released.

"We don't want them to lift a track off the new album — what we'd like to do is to record another number specifically for a single and at the moment none of the numbers we've got, and we've got several, unrecorded, are suitable for a single. None of them gets across the facets of the band in three minutes.

"We don't object to the idea of singles — just because 75 per cent of the singles charts is a bunch of crap doesn't mean to say that there aren't any good songs in the singles charts."

Musically in the future Turner says they just have no definite plans or direction. He jokes about their manager Miles who is American and would have them be the first band to play on the moon.

"Only thing is, he's a bit worried about how many people we'd draw."

And on the subject of people they draw — we moved on to Bickershaw where there were some 30,000 people in attendance when Wishbone played yet the band didn't seem very at home on a festival site.

"We've done quite a few festivals yet everyone still says they

don't think we are a festival band. I wouldn't agree with that because I believe we can play festivals.

"Unfortunately at Bickershaw it was like one o'clock in the morning and everyone was asleep or huddled in their sleeping bag trying to keep dry — the whole thing was a wash out."

This week Wishbone are off to America. And before you start to complain that 'there goes another British band lost to the States' Turner has this to say:

"A lot of people criticise British bands for going to the States because they feel that we're forsaking England. In England it's very difficult to make a band pay, economically, you'll have to take my word on that but it's true."

Another gig

Apart from the financial thing, we feel that since you can jump on a plane and be there in eight hours, that America is just another place to play. I mean if we were bombing up the M1 to Glasgow or Edinburgh it would probably take us longer than it would to get to New York but I'm sure we wouldn't have a bunch of kids saying 'Why are Wishbone forsaking England and going to Glasgow?' It's just that if there is a demand, we'll play there."

Unlike other bands who try to bore you once they have made it with tales of poverty in their early days, Wishbone have no wish to bore. Turner even jokes about it

"Wow man, you should have seen us when we were really down, we were eating rice and rice for dinner . . ."

However I did ask his opinion on the theory that any good band, in order to be great does have to go through really bad times.

"Yes — like Ted in our band is very good on a bluesy type thing. He can sing blues with a helluva lot of conviction and our manager said (jokingly we trust), 'Look Ted. You can't sing the blues so well since you've been earning money, so I'm going to stop your money.'"

"Money obviously is desirable in one way but we've found that the more money you get, the more responsibilities it brings with it."

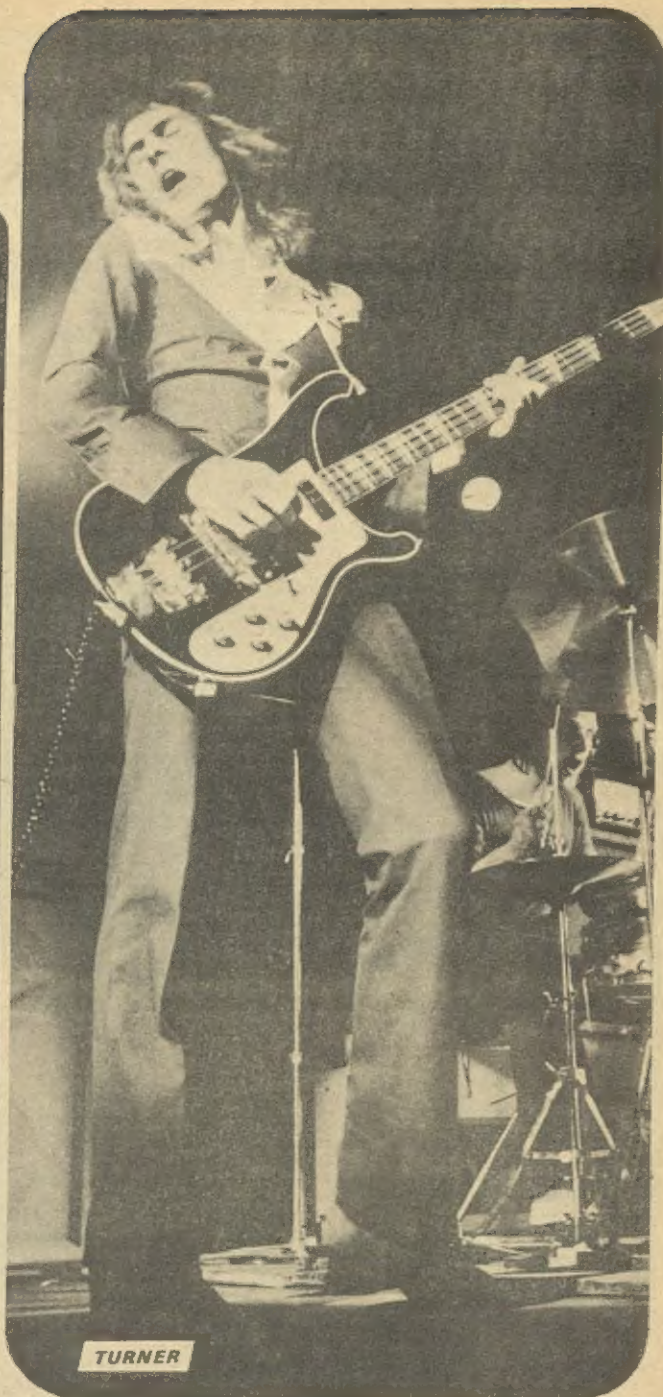
Listening carefully to all Wishbone music you can hear definite classical influences coming through. Turner comments:

"I'm the only person in the group who is classically interested and that's because my dad used to bash me over the head when I was a little boy and say 'you sit there and listen to Mozart and Tchaikovsky' and things like that.

"It's a thing I have in my blood and it's the kind of thing that sticks with you. I think it shows only as an influence — we don't attempt to play classical music arranged as rock music."

Two tracks on "Argus", stand out in particular — "The Warri-

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TURNER